

House of Commons
Science and Technology Committee

**THE RESEARCH
ASSESSMENT EXERCISE:
GOVERNMENT RESPONSE
to the Committee's Second Report**

Fifth Special Report of
Session 2001–02

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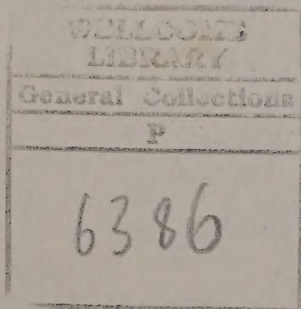
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FIFTH SPECIAL REPORT

**The Science and Technology Committee has agreed to the following
Special Report:**

THE RESEARCH ASSESSMENT EXERCISE: GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE COMMITTEE'S SECOND REPORT OF SESSION 2001-02

1. The Science and Technology Committee reported to the House on the Research Assessment Exercise in its Second Report of this Session, published on 25 April 2002 as HC 507.
2. The Government's response to the Committee's Report was received on 21 June 2002 in the form of a memorandum to the Committee. It is reproduced as Appendix 1 to this Special Report.
3. A response from the Higher Education Funding Council for England, also received on 21 June 2002, is reproduced as Appendix 2 to this Special Report.
4. We publish these responses without comment, so that they are available in time for the debate in Westminster Hall on Thursday 27 June.

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APPENDIX 1

The Government's Response to the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee Report on the Research Assessment Exercise

1. The Committee has produced a timely report dealing with some important issues around the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE). This Government response sets out some general points before responding to the specific recommendations and conclusions. The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) will respond separately to the Report. While the RAE is UK-wide and operated on behalf of all the higher education funding bodies, the devolved administrations are responsible for research assessment and the funding of higher education in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. This response therefore focuses on issues relating to England.

The need for excellent research

2. Research is a public good with substantial economic and social benefits. In the UK, as in all advanced countries, the Government funds a key segment of the nation's research effort. Although industry and commerce have a large research commitment, their research investment is, quite rightly, mostly near-market. Business does not tend to engage in speculative basic research, where the returns are often uncertain, long-term, and difficult for one company to capture. Government investment is required to provide the basic new knowledge on which further research can build. A strong publicly funded knowledge base also has benefits in ensuring a supply of highly skilled people with the capability to carry out research in the public and private sectors, to innovate and to make use of new knowledge not just from the UK but from across the world.

Encouraging excellence

3. Government funding for research is via the dual support system. The higher education funding bodies, HEFCE in England, provide funding to institutions. The UK-wide Research Councils provide funding for specific research programmes and projects in their respective areas of interest. The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) sets the overall framework and policy objectives for HEFCE. The Council is then responsible within that framework for devising funding mechanisms that will achieve those policy objectives, and distributing resources provided by DfES to institutions. The DfES also works in partnership with the Department of Trade and Industry, in particular with the Office of Science and Technology (OST) which funds the Research Councils, to ensure a co-ordinated Government approach to the funding of research.

4. Government funding for research will always be limited. It must therefore be appropriately targeted. The first priority must be to sustain and encourage world class research which will support economic growth and improved productivity. The RAE and the quality related funding system are mechanisms developed to pursue this overall objective. Funding via Research Councils also encourages excellence by awarding project funding only to the best research, decided by a process of peer review.

Achievements of the current system

5. The UK's scientific research is very strong when compared internationally. The UK has the second highest share of publications and citations in the world, and is also second in the world in 15 out of 20 scientific fields, being placed no lower than fifth in any field. The USA has the largest share of publications and citations in each case, but the UK is in first place when it comes to publications and citations per £m spent on research.

6. The system is delivering. Since its development in the late 1980s, the RAE and quality related funding have helped to improve the overall quality and the value for money of research in higher education. As the Committee recognises, the RAE has led to institutions managing their research activity more strategically and has encouraged them to target funds at areas of research excellence.

7. The 2001 RAE results show a higher proportion than ever of UK researchers operating at international levels of excellence. An element of the improvement could be due to institutions getting better at presenting themselves for the RAE. However, citation measures also show a substantial improvement in the UK's research standing since the mid 1990s – the proportion of UK entries in the annual top 1 per cent of most highly cited papers in the world increased from 11 per cent in 1995 to 18 per cent in 2000. This suggests that a good proportion of the improvement shown in the RAE results is genuine improvement in quality. It is welcome that the Committee also acknowledged this in its report.

Current issues

8. The Government agrees that the system does need looking at again.

9. There will always be more demands for research funding than the public purse can afford. The issues around the implementation of the 2001 RAE centred both on the amount of funding available and the way it was distributed. The Government is looking at funding levels for research as part of the current Spending Review. It will also be important to examine how future research assessment and future funding decisions should fit together. However, this cannot become a demand-led budget. Total funding will still be set in Spending Reviews and there will always be a need to allocate limited funding in the way likely to achieve the best results.

10. Given the funding pressures, the Government supports HEFCE's decision to ensure that there was no cut in funding rates, on average, for 5* rated departments. It was most important to ensure that these world class departments were resourced to deliver the leading edge research of which they had shown themselves capable. The funding distribution did however result in lower unit funding for departments with lower ratings despite the additional £30m DfES was able to make available. HEFCE will want to review the distribution in the light of the resources made available to the Council as a result of the Spending Review.

11. There are some further questions to consider on the future development of selectivity. The quality scale now has seven points, of which the three lower grades do not attract HEFCE funding, while more departments than ever are bunched at the top end of the scale where further improvement would not be recognised. The scale needs to provide proper assessment and encouragement for departments at all levels, and allow us to identify and properly fund our world class research.

12. Some of the other lessons of the RAE will also need to be considered. The Committee's report identifies a number of ways in which the RAE may be influencing behaviour. It is impossible to eliminate side effects and unintended outcomes entirely from an incentive system: the aim has to be to minimise these effects and ensure that the benefits in terms of improved performance outweigh the disadvantages.

Next steps for research funding and assessment

13. The Government continues to believe that research funding should encourage and strengthen excellence, and that higher education institutions should be incentivised to continue to improve the quality of their research following the excellent progress in the last few years. However, the way in which the assessment and funding system operates needs to be revisited. The next steps include:

- a. the 2002 Spending Review settlement which will set out the resources available until 2005-6, and will be informed by the cross-cutting review of science and research
- b. the development of Government plans for the evolution of the dual support system
- c. the development of HEFCE's strategic plan for 2003-08
- d. the review of the RAE.

Response to specific conclusions and recommendations

Accuracy of the RAE results

1. With such a spectacular increase in RAE ratings, it is legitimate to ask whether the improvement is a true reflection of the state of UK academic research and its performance over the last five years. The evidence we have received suggests that most in the science and education communities agree with HEFCE's assertion that it is largely a reflection of reality (paragraph 22).

The Government agrees with the Committee's conclusion that the improvements in research performance as measured by the RAE were largely genuine. Universities and higher education colleges are to be congratulated for the high quality of their research performance, by managing their research strategically and building on their strengths.

2. There is concern about the non-inclusion of researchers. ... Funding should reflect the actual amount of research and its quality over the whole department and not those deemed active. Universities should have no incentive to omit any researchers (paragraph 24).

3. There is concern that by moving researchers between UoAs or splitting and merging departments universities can improve ratings without any improvements in quality (paragraph 25).

4. There is concern that transfers between institutions can distort the RAE results (paragraph 27).

Any quality assurance system has a tendency to encourage those being assessed to present themselves in the best possible way, and the RAE is no different. However, the overall effect of the RAE has been to improve higher education research performance. The RAE has encouraged universities to manage their research strategically and focus on their strengths, bringing real improvements in quality in the sector. They have also focused on staffing and have been made aware of the importance of recruiting, retaining and supporting the top researchers on whom research excellence depends. Government will ensure that these and other issues raised by the Committee are considered in the forthcoming review of the RAE.

5. There are concerns about the way the panels operated and their membership (paragraph 28).

6. We recommend that, in any future RAE, HEFCE provide panel members with more effective administrative support. Ensuring the validity of the results is money well spent (paragraph 29).

The way the panels operate is crucial to the success of the RAE. It is important to ensure that the process is effective at objectively judging the quality of research. That does mean that members should be drawn from a wide range of interests, should have the right knowledge and bring an appropriate mix of perspectives. Strong administrative support is required. It is particularly important to include users such as business people, and to bring an international perspective to bear. The 2001 RAE had more user representatives than the 1996 exercise, and there was a new mechanism for international verification of results, but there may well be scope for still more emphasis on breadth in future.

7. With the above reservations we accept the widespread view that the RAE ratings reflect an improvement in UK higher education research (paragraph 31).

The Government agrees with this conclusion. The RAE 2001 ratings reflect real improvements in research quality.

Effects of the RAE

8. Most of the evidence we have received has suggested that the RAE has had a beneficial effect on research in the UK (paragraph 32).

The Government agrees that the RAE and quality related research funding have encouraged improved performance.

9. We have heard of concerns that the RAE has imposed large costs and bureaucracy on universities, hampered teaching, distorted research practice, led to neglect of universities' other activities and severely damaged academics' morale (paragraph 33).

10. If HEFCE believes in the value of the RAE, it should establish clearly how much it costs and show why it is worth it. We recommend that, as part of its review of the RAE, HEFCE establish with accuracy the cost of the RAE 2001 and publish costings and an explanation of how these were calculated (paragraph 33).

The Government agrees that there should be no unnecessary bureaucracy in the assessment of research. The aim is to get better research for the public money available, not to waste resources through excessive burdens on institutions. It will be important, as part of the forthcoming review, to look at the cost of the RAE and the extent to which it provides value for money. It will also be important to examine the extent to which the system does influence institutions' behaviour, and to minimise inappropriate effects in future.

11. The RAE has undoubtedly brought benefits but it has also caused collateral damage. It has damaged staff careers and it has distracted universities from their teaching, community and economic development roles. Higher education should encourage excellence in all these areas, not just in research. Universities should be assessed on a balanced score-card (paragraph 59).

If peers assess research we expect them to come out with honest judgements on quality. Those judgements may not always fit with the aspirations of staff, departments or indeed institutions, but that open assessment is important in achieving our research objectives. The RAE has no doubt strongly influenced university management practice and strategic priorities, and has brought a strong focus to research. The Government wants to see excellence in teaching standards, knowledge transfer and widening participation as well. HEFCE is reconsidering its funding model with these aims in mind, and Government will consider the interaction between HEFCE funding and other relevant streams e.g. DTI/OST funding for knowledge transfer.

Research practice

12. Some of the most outstanding achievements in UK science have resulted from long periods of research with no outputs ... We are concerned that the RAE process may discourage long-term research of a highly speculative nature and stifle scientific breakthroughs (paragraph 37).

13. While we accept that publication practice is somewhat different in the humanities, we believe that the shorter period of assessment for the sciences discriminates against scientists involved in long-term research. We suggest that seven years would be a more reasonable period of assessment for the sciences as well as the humanities (paragraph 38).

Long term and speculative work is important. Institutions' RAE related funding does in fact provide them with continuing, entirely flexible funding which can be used to carry out this sort of work on their own initiative – including research which Research Councils and other project sponsors are not willing to fund. The review of the RAE will need to consider how frequently assessment takes place, the eligibility period for different subjects, and to what degree 'research in progress' should be assessed.

14. We recommend that HEFCE ensure that its quality assessment does not discourage or disadvantage interdisciplinary research. Such research offers some of the most fertile ground for innovation and discovery (paragraph 39).

Interdisciplinary research can be particularly valuable and should be encouraged. The RAE process was modified in 2001 to allow for interdisciplinary research to be considered more effectively. It will be important to evaluate the mechanisms used in 2001 carefully in looking to ensure that interdisciplinary research is properly assessed in future.

15. We recommend that HEFCE keep unit boundaries under review to ensure that subjects of increasing importance are fairly assessed (paragraph 40).

The Government agrees with this aim, and the issue will be considered in the review of the RAE.

Morale and careers

16. It is clear that the RAE has had a negative effect on university staff morale. Any future research assessment mechanism must be able to give a fair appraisal of the research without tempting universities to continue the divisive and demoralising practice of excluding some academics from the process (paragraph 41).

At present it is for individual institutions to decide which staff they submit to the RAE. How this should be handled in a future RAE mechanism is a matter to be considered in the forthcoming review.

17. We welcome HEFCE's imminent research project into women in higher education research and recommend that it should analyse RAE data as part of this study. It is vital that women's research careers are not further impeded (paragraph 42).

The Government agrees with this recommendation and looks forward to seeing the results of this project. The Government places a great deal of importance on equal opportunities in HE. Like other employers HEIs are responsible for ensuring they implement equal opportunities legislation and fair employment policies.

National priorities

18. The RAE may not be the primary cause of departmental closures [in science and engineering] but we suspect that it is a contributory factor. Nationally important research that makes a major contribution to the economy must not be destroyed because of trends in student demand (paragraph 44).

Higher education institutions make their own decisions on their internal structure, the courses they offer and the research they carry out. This academic autonomy is fundamental to the HE system and helps ensure that the system is adaptable and independent.

The supply of science and engineering talent is of great importance to the UK. The Government commissioned Sir Gareth Roberts to review this area and is currently considering the recommendations of his recently published report.

19. In our view, it is better to address national research priorities through a funding mechanism rather than by tinkering with the assessment process. HEFCE should protect or enhance key research areas by changing the cost weightings for some UoAs or by introducing ring-fenced funding (paragraph 45).

The Government agrees that national research priorities should not be addressed through the assessment process. The Committee's report refers to the DfES suggestion of further discrimination between departments currently rated 5*. The intention would not be to discriminate according to the importance of the subject area, but rather according to quality. National priorities are currently addressed through other funding routes rather than through HEFCE. The Research Councils are a key mechanism for doing this, for example the Government made an additional £250 million available at the last Spending Review to focus on priorities such as genomics, e-science and basic technology. The cost weightings used by HEFCE are a mechanism to avoid distortion by reflecting the relative costs of research in different subjects, rather than an incentive mechanism.

Neglect of teaching and other university activities

20. The RAE, and the funding decisions based on it, create incentives for universities that could lead to them neglecting other areas of their functions: teaching; community involvement; commercial activity; and research in local or regional significance. This may have major implications for the nature of UK universities (paragraph 46).

21. It is not for the RAE to reward teaching, but there must be a counter-incentive to promote good teaching and encourage good teachers. We believe that there must be financial incentives for improving the quality of teaching but that the burdens and problems of measuring teaching quality are such that funding based on it should be a last resort. HEFCE and universities must work together to provide well-paid and prestigious career positions for academics who are primarily teachers (paragraph 49).

The Government agrees that research excellence is only one focus for higher education institutions. Other Government aims are to widen participation, promote high quality teaching and ensure effective knowledge transfer. Institutions should be encouraged to focus on their strengths, and all higher education institutions will not operate at the same level on each of these areas. HEFCE is reviewing the funding model to provide appropriate financial incentives across the range of Government priorities.

The Government provides three times as much funding for teaching as it does for research via HEFCE. The 2000 Spending Review plans included resources to support increases in academic and non-academic pay: an additional £50 million in 2001-02, rising to £110 million in 2002-3 and £170 million in 2003-04.

22. We are supportive of high-quality teaching in a high-quality research environment and find it hard to see how this can be reconciled with the concept of a teaching-only university (paragraph 51).

23. If the best researchers are concentrated in a small number of departments, we risk losing the next generation of scientists. At a time when the Government is concerned about the supply of scientists in the economy, HEFCE should be encouraging high-quality research wherever there is teaching (paragraph 52).

Teaching does need to be in touch with the forefront of the academic subject but this can be achieved through scholarship as well as through research. The Government's priority for research is to support the best work wherever it is found, and to maintain and develop high quality departments so that they can continue to compete with the best in the world. Within the available resources for research it is vital that a policy of selective funding is pursued. If resources were spread thinly enough to encourage research wherever there is teaching, it would endanger the UK's world class research performance and represent poor value for money from the public investment.

24. We are concerned that the pressures placed on academics, not least through the RAE, make community involvement less likely (paragraph 53).

Higher education institutions have an important role to play in their communities. Some aspects of this role are encouraged through specific initiatives such as the Active Community Fund and the Higher Education Reach-Out to Business and the Community Fund.

Knowledge transfer

25. We recommend that, in its review of the RAE, HEFCE consider the impact of the RAE on knowledge transfer activity, and investigate whether panels have accorded due status to industrial research outputs. The Government wishes to encourage industrial collaboration and the commercialisation of research and HEFCE must ensure that the RAE does not undermine this (paragraph 54).

The Government is committed to promoting knowledge transfer between the higher education sector and industry, and is aware of criticism that the RAE acts as a disincentive. The definition of research that applies to the RAE includes "work of direct relevance to the needs of industry and commerce" and acceptance of this type of work has developed over the life of the RAE. HEFCE increased the representation of industrialists on panels for the 2001 RAE and emphasised that research products of all types including patents, designs, new products and devices, and commercial and technical reports could be included. DfES will ensure that HEFCE evaluates the results of this in the RAE 2001 submissions and results. There are separate funding streams, particularly the Higher Education Innovation Fund, which provide resources for knowledge transfer. The Cross-cutting Review of Science and Research is considering whether more needs to be done to incentivise HEIs to work with industry.

26. The Government may need to intervene to ensure that research excellence is represented in the regions of the UK, perhaps by encouraging regional networks in important subjects (paragraph 55).

Research excellence is currently represented in all regions and this should continue. Government is encouraging better links between HEFCE, Higher Education Institutions, Regional Development Agencies, and other key regional stakeholders. The Cross-cutting Review of Science and Research is considering what more might be done to promote the regional development of research excellence; a good regional spread is particularly important.

27. Research into matters of local importance can be vital to communities and the economy. If the RAE cannot recognise such work a mechanism needs to be identified that will (paragraph 56).

The Government agrees that such research is vital. The RAE can fund this type of research. The RAE simply assesses quality, it makes no judgement on the nature of the research HEIs should carry out. HEIs decide how to use the money they receive.

28. HEFCE should monitor levels of investment in infrastructure carefully and if necessary introduce a recurrent funding stream (paragraph 57).

The Government has already demonstrated its commitment to investment in research infrastructure with the £1,750 million made available for HE institutions and other publicly funded research establishments, in partnership with the Wellcome Trust, in the last two Spending Reviews. The Cross-cutting Review of Science and Research is considering research infrastructure as part of its contribution to the spending review.

Funding the RAE

29. We believe that HEFCE was right to use RAE 2001 [to determine the research funding for 2002-03]: if you have a selective mechanism for funding it should reflect the current state of research. But we take issue with the way the cake was cut (paragraph 69).

The Government takes note of the Committee's statement but the priority is to support high quality research departments so that they can maintain their positions of international excellence. The Government therefore agrees with HEFCE's decision to prioritise top rated departments.

30. We recommend that the Government introduce and resource a seedcorn fund to stimulate the development of research in new departments, as part of a strategic framework for research funding (paragraph 71).

The Government recognises the potential benefits of developing research in new departments. There is always a balance to be struck between funding new research and funding research of proven quality. At present the emphasis must remain on properly funding research which is already of world class quality. Future funding decisions will need to be taken in the light of the spending review settlement.

31. We recommend that HEFCE introduce a more sophisticated weighting system which accurately reflects the high costs of research in certain scientific subjects (paragraph 73).

Funding weights should reflect the relative costs of conducting research in different disciplines. The mechanism for doing this is for HEFCE to keep under review. This is one of a number of issues which HEFCE and the Research Councils will work on closely in the future.

Responsibility

32. In their evidence to us, HEFCE seemed to believe that any side effects of the RAE were unfortunate and somehow nothing to do with them. If HEFCE has a mechanism for selective research funding then it must take responsibility for any distortion it causes (paragraph 58).

It is impossible to eliminate side effects and unintended outcomes entirely from an incentive system: the aim has to be to minimise these effects and ensure that the benefits in terms of improved performance outweigh the disadvantages.

33. While HEFCE cannot be blamed for the level of funding that is available for higher education research, it must bear primary responsibility for the way the RAE funding deficit has been handled (paragraph 74).

34. Some responsibility for the funding decisions must lie with the DfES and with the Minister for Lifelong Learning and Higher Education. ... The RAE and the funding decisions based on it have major repercussions for the higher education system. We find it hard to believe that the Minister is prepared to delegate all that power to an unelected quango. It cannot be in the public interest that she should do so (paragraph 75).

The Government sets the policy objectives for public funding of higher education and provides a steer to HEFCE in the annual remit letter. It is HEFCE's responsibility to put those policies into effect. The RAE can never become a mechanism for determining how much money the Government should spend on research. That is a matter for Ministers and we accept responsibility for funding levels. The separation of responsibilities is designed to preserve academic independence while providing a mechanism to improve the performance of the HE sector in line with the Government's priorities.

35. The DfES must also bear some responsibility for the financial dilemma which HEFCE has been facing. ... We appreciate that the Government has a number of priorities in education, but it must not lose sight of the need to maintain and develop an excellent research base. We welcome the Minister's commitment to fight for a generous settlement for higher education in the Spending Review (paragraph 76).

The Research Assessment Exercise is designed to measure the quality of research, it is not a mechanism for determining the total amount of funding that should be made available. In the light of the 2001 RAE the DfES was able to provide an extra £30m to help fund high quality research in 2002-03. Funding decisions for 2003-04 onwards will be taken as part of the current Spending Review.

36. We fully accept that higher education is the responsibility of DfES, not of DTI, but we would suggest that the Cabinet Minister for Science should take a closer interest in the RAE and in the future of higher education research, since it is vitally important to the future of science and technology in the UK (paragraph 77).

The Cabinet Minister responsible for science regularly takes advice on a range of issues relating to research funding and assessment from the Minister for Science and Innovation, the Chief Scientific Adviser, who is also Head of the DTI's Office of Science & Technology, and the

Director-General of the Research Councils. The Chief Scientific Adviser is Chairman of the Science and Engineering Base Co-ordinating Committee, whose remit includes both research assessment and the development of the UK science base.

Under-funding

37. Discussions about the mechanism for the allocation of research funding are largely meaningless unless the under-funding of university research is addressed. ...There is a strong case for a substantial increase in the HE research budget. This should not be less than the £200 million per year required to fund the RAE 2001 using the formula employed until recently and to restore the project funding/QR ratio to 1993-94 levels. Borne in mind should be the chronic under-funding in university research for much longer than this (paragraph 78).

Funding decisions for 2003-04 onwards will be taken as part of the current Spending Review.

38. We welcome the science and research cross-cutting review and trust that it will spell out clearly for the Treasury the value of science and engineering research and its present parlous state of under-funding ... UK university research is already among the best in the world without the funding it deserves. The Spending Review 2000 brought great benefits for the Science Budget. Now has come the time to put right the imbalance in the dual support system by delivering a significant increase in funding for higher education research (paragraph 79).

As the Committee notes, the UK punches above its weight in terms of its research performance. The work of the Cross-cutting Review is being considered as part of the Spending Review.

Options for the future

39. It is generally agreed that the RAE has achieved all it can in its present form. The question is whether we abandon it completely or whether it could form part of a broader funding mechanism for higher education research (paragraph 80).

The RAE does need to be reviewed. The Committee's report will be useful in that context.

40. We are not persuaded that research assessment should rely entirely on success in obtaining Research Council grants (paragraph 82).

Research assessment does not at present rely on success in obtaining Research Council funding, nor is there any proposal that it should. Quality related research funding is part of the plurality of the present research funding arrangements, which we regard as a strength of the UK system.

41. It is generally agreed that there is a future for the RAE, but not in its current form. We need an RAE with a lighter touch (paragraph 83).

The Government agrees that there should be some form of RAE. A quality mechanism is vital in order to help distribute what amounts to nearly £1 billion of public funding for research in

England alone. As part of the Review of the RAE, both the Government and HEFCE will consider whether a lighter touch assessment is appropriate.

42. We recommend that the RAE should take place every six years, with interim assessment as requested by developing departments or as considered necessary by HEFCE (paragraph 84).

43. We believe that the RAE should continue but only as part of a broader higher education research funding strategy in which its side effects and disadvantages are offset by other mechanisms. We suggest the following model for discussion. HEFCE's research budget could be divided into four sections –

- (1) *Funding excellence.* Top-rated departments would be exempted from the formal research assessment process if they wish [and funded on their ability to attract external funding].**
- (2) *Promoting new centres of excellence.* Other departments could continue to take part in a research assessment process.**
- (3) *Developing research capacity.* Departments taking part in the research assessment process could apply for development money through a bidding process and would be assessed by subject panels based upon the RAE UoAs.**
- (4) *Fostering external collaborative research.* This fund would support the indirect costs of institutions attracting external project funding [for departments entering the formal assessment process] (paragraph 86).**

44. This model of research funding could operate within a broader system of higher education funding which provides incentives for excellence in all areas of universities' activities: teaching, community and economic involvement as well as research. The aim should be to produce a coherent funding system, with a small number of flexible funds (paragraph 88).

This model will be carefully considered by both the Government and HEFCE as the RAE and the research funding system are revisited.

45. No doubt the Funding Councils' review of the RAE will consider a range of options for the future. We await its outcome with great interest, since it will have important implications for the future of science and technology in the UK. An effective funding mechanism for research infrastructure will be crucial if we are to maintain and enhance the UK's research excellence and exploit it successfully. It is essential that DfES, the Funding Councils, the devolved administrations, OST and the Research Councils work closely together to ensure that the funding to the science base is coherent and adequate to maintain the quality of UK research. We shall follow developments closely and, if necessary, report again to the House (paragraph 89).

The Government agrees in the importance of good partnership working to ensure a coherent and effective funding system and the continued development of high quality research.

APPENDIX 2

The RAE: HEFCE Responses to the Report of the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee

Background

1. On 25 April 2002 the House of Commons Select Committee on Science and Technology on the Research Assessment Exercise published its report into the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE). This memorandum presents the response of the HEFCE to that report.

General Comments

2. The Select Committee's report on the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) is a timely reminder of the importance of the exercise, and the complexity surrounding the issues it raises. We are committed to carrying out a review of the RAE, and the Committee's report will provide a valuable contribution to our review¹.

3. Nevertheless, we were disappointed that so much of the Select Committee's conclusions were based on assertion and on reports of views which had been expressed to it, without supporting evidence. As we conduct our review we will need to ensure that our conclusions, and our proposals for the future, are based on sound analysis of the facts, and are supported by evidence.

4. In this memorandum, we take the 46 points made by the Select Committee in their report, and provide a response to each in turn.

Accuracy of the RAE results

Point 1. With such a spectacular increase in RAE ratings, it is legitimate to ask whether the improvement is a true reflection of the state of UK academic research and its performance over the last five years. The evidence we have received suggests that most in the science and education communities agree with HEFCE's assertion that it is largely a reflection of reality (paragraph 22).

5. We agree with this conclusion. In our memorandum to the Select Committee we explained why we believed that there had been a substantial improvement in research in this country since 1996, relative to other countries, and we are glad that the Select Committee has been persuaded by this evidence.

¹ NB. Whilst HEFCE is responsible for conducting the RAE, it does so on behalf of the four UK funding bodies (HEFCE, HEFCW, SHEFC and DELNI). When considering the future of the RAE, therefore, our comments should be taken to refer to HEFCE's input into discussions on the future of the exercise and should not be taken to imply that HEFCE is in a position to change the RAE without reference to the other funding bodies.

Point 2. There is concern about the non-inclusion of researchers. ... Funding should reflect the actual amount of research and its quality over the whole department and not those deemed active. Universities should have no incentive to omit any researchers (paragraph 24).

6. What is at issue here is the fact that the RAE allows institutions to submit only those staff they choose to designate as research active² and to a lesser extent the fact that they are free to submit staff to whichever unit of assessment (UoA) they deem most appropriate.

7. As the first to give evidence to the Select Committee, we were taken aback by the strength of the Committee's presumption that it was somehow illegitimate for institutions to be assessed on a proportion of their staff. Some members, in particular the Chair, seemed to consider this to be self-evident, to the extent that it required neither explication nor justification. We are glad that, in the light of subsequent hearings, the Committee has developed an articulate case on this matter to which we can respond.

8. In our view there are two issues here: the implications for the validity of the assessment, and the unintended effects of the discretion given to institutions upon researchers and the research base. We concur with what we take to be the Committee's view that the latter issue gives more cause for concern than the former. We will be mindful of the Committee's findings in reviewing the RAE but must be careful not to prejudge the case in advance of our review.

The validity of the RAE results

9. It seems to us that giving institutions discretion as to who is assessed enhances the validity of the result for four reasons:

a. It means that strong research groups situated in teaching departments alongside staff with relatively little engagement in research can be recognised in funding where otherwise their departments might fall beneath the threshold for the receipt of funds. The Committee has expressed its concern at the concentration of research in fewer and fewer departments: discretion actually mitigates this effect.

b. It focuses the attention of panels (and indeed the RAE administration) on those outputs considered most important. Abolishing discretion would have the effect of increasing the volume of material for assessment (and the logistical challenge for institutional libraries as well as the RAE) to a level where the quality of attention panels could give to each researcher's work may be compromised.

c. We consider that something the Committee regards as a games playing strategy – moving good researchers into units where they will have the greatest effect upon ratings and funding – is legitimate. If a world class researcher in a department rated 2 in 1996 (which would

² It is disingenuous to suggest, as some have, that the term 'research active staff' is anything other than a technical term for those the institution chooses to include in the assessment. HEFCE is aware of the concern that the term may be misunderstood by those unfamiliar with the RAE process as indicating whether or not an individual is engaged in research. It also accepts that the mere existence of this concern represents a strong argument for not employing the term in future. However the notion that there is a lack of appreciation *within the HE sector* of the term's true meaning seems to us to be an extremely improbable one. Equally the use of the term 'research active staff' cannot be taken to imply that the RAE is intended to assess all research and is not relevant to the question of whether it *ought* to do so.

receive no funding) is moved to a department which was rated 5 in 2001 this would mean that, quite properly (s)he would attract funding to the institution. This does not affect the integrity of the result – it actually enhances it.

d. Allowing institutions to choose where (as well as whether) to submit individuals is more neutral than any central decision on which individuals are to be submitted to which units ever could be.

10. More generally, it is a fact that in the increasingly diverse higher education sector there are significant numbers of staff who do not undertake research and do not claim to do so. This seems to us to be quite proper. We see no benefit in requiring the submission for assessment of staff who do not claim to do research: indeed it might have the perverse effect of putting pressure on such staff to undertake research, at the expense of their other commitments. In this respect, of course, the situation is different from when the Universities Grant Commission (UGC) and Universities Funding Council (UFC) undertook the Research Assessment Exercise, where there was a reasonable presumption that all staff in the institutions concerned undertook research to some extent.

11. There is a different question of whether panels should take into account the extent of research activity in a department when giving grades. An extension of this is whether the publication of the grades should somehow reflect the proportion of staff submitted for assessment. These are all matters which will be addressed in the review of the RAE.

Unintended effects of the RAE

12. There is however a strong case for detailed investigation of the effects of the RAE upon the decisions taken by institutions in relation to their staff and upon staff morale. Disentangling the effects of the RAE from the effects of funding levels and other pressures upon the sector is not as straightforward as it may appear. We suspect that the RAE is often assumed (or claimed) to be responsible for management decisions which are deemed necessary for other reasons. Even if this is true, however it is still important to understand the effects of the exercise in detail.

Point 3. There is concern that by moving researchers between UoAs or splitting and merging departments universities can improve ratings without any improvement in quality (paragraph 25).

Point 4. There is concern that transfers between institutions can distort the RAE results (paragraph 27).

13. There was (and we suspect, still is) a real difference of opinion between the Committee and the HEFCE as to what constitutes ‘games-playing’. The Committee appeared, for example, to regard submitting fewer than 100 per cent of staff as a means of cheating or outwitting the system. In the last answer we attempt to refute this notion (as noted above, the Committee’s implied argument that selective inclusion of staff may affect management practice within institutions for the worse, is in our view a more serious charge, which we will examine).

Point 5. There are concerns about the way the panels operated and their membership (paragraph 28).

14. We do not accept the Select Committee's suggestion that panel members were drawn from a narrow range of interests. It is worth reminding the Select Committee of the steps taken in the last exercise to appoint panels. The panel chair was elected by the outgoing panel, not appointed by the Funding Councils as in previous exercises. Advertisements were placed to seek nominations for panel members. 1,500 bodies – representing a very wide range of interests – made nominations, and panel chairs were obliged to select members of the panels from these nominations, having regard to the spread of knowledge and expertise required for the panel to operate effectively. Perhaps more could have been done to ensure an even greater range of interests on the panels, but we know of no exercise where more strenuous steps are taken to ensure appropriate membership of peer review bodies.

15. As far as user members of panels are concerned, there are lessons to be learned from the different approaches to the engagement of users adopted by different panels. In general, there was far more engagement by user representatives in the 2001 exercise than in previous exercises, and there is a consensus that this was a welcome development. The Committee is absolutely right to suggest that the time commitment is a particularly important issue for non-academics. It may be possible to develop special arrangements for user input, or it may be that the only workable solution is to change the process to reduce the time commitment across the board so as to enable greater user involvement.

Point 6. We recommend that, in any future RAE, HEFCE provide panel members with more effective administrative support. Ensuring the validity of the results is money well spent (paragraph 29).

16. As regards administrative support, we agree with the Committee that this is a very important exercise, and we must ensure that sufficient resources are devoted to it. We will learn whatever lessons are to be learned in this respect from the experience of the 2001 RAE.

Point 7. With the above reservations, we accept the widespread view that the RAE ratings reflect an improvement in UK higher education research (paragraph 31).

17. This is covered in the answers given above.

Effects of the RAE

Point 8. Most of the evidence we have received has suggested that the RAE has had a broadly beneficial effect on research in the UK (paragraph 32).

18. We welcome the Committee's view that the RAE has had a broadly beneficial effect, and we concur.

Point 9. We have heard of concerns that the RAE has imposed large costs and bureaucracy on universities, hampered teaching, distorted research practice, led to neglect of universities' other activities and severely damaged academics' morale (paragraph 33).

19. It is not clear if the Committee is here merely reporting hearsay, or stating its conclusion. If the former, then it would be good to know the Committee's conclusion. If the latter, then it would have been helpful to have evidence to support the Committee's conclusion. These are

serious allegations, and we will be seeking evidence for them in the course of the review of the RAE. In general, though, we accept that research funding is much more competitive than funding for other activities, and that this provides an incentive to focus excessively on research. Institutions undoubtedly go to great lengths to present themselves as well as they can, and this leads to greater effort being expended on the exercise than is strictly necessary.

Point 10. If HEFCE believes in the value of the RAE, it should establish clearly how much it costs and show why it is worth it. We recommended that, as part of its review of the RAE, HEFCE establish with accuracy the cost of RAE 2001 and publish costings and an explanation of how these were calculated (paragraph 33).

20. We will certainly seek to establish the costs of RAE 2001 and publish an account both of the findings and the methodology employed.

Point 11. The RAE has undoubtedly brought benefits but it has also caused collateral damage. It has damaged staff careers and it has distracted universities from their teaching, community and economic development roles. Higher education should encourage excellence in all these areas, not just in research. Universities should be assessed on a balance score-card (paragraph 59).

21. Again, we would be interested to have evidence for the assertion that universities have been distracted from their teaching, community and economic development roles. On the contrary, there is good evidence that the quality of teaching in higher education has improved, as has the extent of interaction with business and the community. We believe that higher education institutions are to be congratulated on the extent and breadth of their achievements - not just in research. We do agree with the Committee, though, that we should encourage excellence across the range of a higher education institution's activities, and we are considering what incentives we should put in place to balance the incentive to carry out excellent research.

Research practice

Point 12. Some of the most outstanding achievements in UK science have resulted from long periods of research with no outputs ... We are concerned that the RAE process may discourage long-term research of a highly speculative nature and stifle scientific breakthroughs (paragraph 37).

22. We agree with the Select Committee that it is essential to the continuing health of the research base that long-term work, and work of a speculative nature, are not discouraged. This is one aspect of our review to which we will be paying particular attention.

Point 13. While we accept that publication practice is somewhat different in the humanities, we believe that the shorter period of assessment for the sciences discriminates against scientists involved in long-term research. We suggest that seven years would be a more reasonable period of assessment for the sciences as well as the humanities (paragraph 38).

23. We find this recommendation surprising, and it flies in the face of much of the evidence we have received. When the longer publication period was introduced for the humanities, most scientists – and social scientists to a lesser extent – who responded to the consultation said that they thought that the requirement for four good publications in five years was an entirely reasonable expectation, in contrast to the humanities where the nature and pattern of publications is quite different. However, this is something we will look at again in our review.

Point 14. We recommend that HEFCE ensure that its quality assessment does not discourage or disadvantage interdisciplinary research. Such research offers some of the most fertile ground for innovation and discovery (paragraph 39).

Point 15. We recommend that HEFCE keep unit boundaries under review to ensure that subjects of increasing importance are fairly assessed (paragraph 40).

24. Both these issues will be considered in our review of the RAE.

Morale and careers

Point 16. It is clear that the RAE has had a negative effect on university staff morale. Any future research assessment mechanism must be able to give a fair appraisal of the research without tempting universities to continue the divisive and demoralising practice of excluding some academics from the process (paragraph 41).

25. As noted above, whilst we do not accept that giving institutions discretion over who they submit affects the validity of the results, we do accept that we have a responsibility to consider the effect upon staff morale and management decisions concerning staff. We will do this as part of the RAE review.

Point 17. We welcome HEFCE's imminent research project into women in higher education research and recommend that it should analyse RAE data as part of this study. It is vital that women's research careers are not further impeded (paragraph 42).

26. We, in turn, welcome the Select Committee's recognition of the importance of the work we are carrying out. We have to be as certain as we can be that the RAE processes do not unwittingly give rise to unwarranted discrimination.

National priorities

Point 18. The RAE may not be the primary cause of departmental closures [in science and engineering] but we suspect that it is a contributory factor. Nationally important research that makes a major contribution to the economy must not be destroyed because of trend in student demand (paragraph 44).

27. We do not understand what point is being made here. The RAE provides a mechanism for allowing continued funding for excellent research, even if student numbers are falling.

Point 19. In our view, it is better to address national research priorities through a funding mechanism rather than by tinkering with the assessment process. HEFCE should protect or enhance key research areas by changing the cost weightings for some UoAs or by introducing ring-fenced funding (paragraph 45).

28. The Select Committee is absolutely right that the function of the assessment process should be to identify high quality, not to establish national priorities. Within the dual support system, it is the Research Councils, along with charities and industry, which set national research priorities, not HEFCE. If this leads to universities doing more research in those subjects identified as priorities, then this will be reflected in the volume weights, and consequently in the funding we provide for those subjects. We believe that this is preferable to tinkering with the cost weights, as the Committee recommends.

Neglect of teaching and other university activities

Point 20. The RAE, and the funding decisions based on it, create incentives for universities that could lead to them neglecting other areas of their functions: teaching; community involvement; commercial activity; and research of local or regional significance. This may have major implications for the nature of UK universities (paragraph 46).

Point 21. It is not for the RAE to reward teaching, but there must be a counter-incentive to promote good teaching and encourage good teachers. We believe that there must be financial incentives for improving the quality of teaching but that the burden and the problems of measuring teaching quality are such that funding based on it should be a last resort. HEFCE and universities must work together to provide well-paid and prestigious career positions for academics who are primarily teachers (paragraph 49).

29. We fully accept the Committee's view on these matters. HEFCE is currently developing its strategic plan for 2003 - 8 and is committed to using that process to explore practical ways of ensuring that excellence in all activities is properly incentivised and rewarded.

Point 22. We are supportive of high-quality teaching in a high-quality research environment and find it hard to see how this can be reconciled with the concept of a teaching-only university (paragraph 51).

Point 23 If the best researchers are concentrated in a small number of departments, we risk losing the next generation of scientists. At a time when Government is concerned about the supply of scientists in the economy, HEFCE should be encouraging high-quality research wherever there is teaching (paragraph 52).

30. On these matters we have, with regret, to dissent from the Committee's position. If the Committee is saying that high-quality teaching cannot take place unless alongside high-quality research, then we know of no evidence for this, and it would have been helpful if the Committee had provided the evidence which leads to its conclusion. Indeed, such evidence as we are aware of suggests that it is quite possible for good teaching to flourish where little research takes place. It is essential that all academic staff should undertake scholarship and remain fully abreast of their subject and its frontiers as these develop. That, however, is different from the assertion that in order to teach well they need themselves to be pushing forward the frontiers of knowledge in their subjects.

31. There is a further dimension to this issue. The Treasury-approved accounting procedures used in the Transparency Review showed UK research in 1999-2000 to be in deficit by a total of £1.35 billion, with most of this deficit being in publicly funded research. In the light of these losses (significantly greater than the combined research budgets of the UK Funding Councils) and unless funding for research increases substantially, it seems to us axiomatic that the volume of research has to reduce. It is the very commitment to research – a professional commitment which often overrides economic considerations – which risks compromising the financial health of universities (the symptom of which is an unsustainable erosion in infrastructure and in staff pay and conditions).

Point 24. We are concerned that the pressures placed on academics, not least through the RAE, make community involvement less likely (paragraph 53).

32. We fully accept that, as we try to develop proper rewards for excellence in activities other than research, community engagement must be included.

Knowledge transfer

Point 25. We recommend that, in its review of the RAE, HEFCE consider the impact of the RAE on knowledge transfer activity, and investigate whether panels have accorded due status to industrial research outputs. The Government wishes to encourage industrial collaboration and the commercialisation of research, and HEFCE must ensure that the RAE does not undermine this (paragraph 54).

33. The RAE is a process hitherto intended solely to identify research quality. It must give full recognition to research which is of benefit to users, and we have sought to ensure that high quality is recognised, whatever the nature of the research. But it is not a process designed to recognise the utility of research. We agree that knowledge transfer is important, and we have sought to recognise that through the establishment of our third funding stream. We are at present considering how to measure the quality of third stream activity, and we will consult further about this as soon as we are able. In the meantime, we agree with the Select Committee that our review of the RAE must ensure that any future process does not undermine the efforts we are making to encourage knowledge transfer of all sorts.

34. We would note in passing that the Committee speaks of ‘industrial collaboration and commercialisation’ but not of other activities which link researchers with the community. It is vital that the activities which rebound most directly to the public benefit – engagement with public sector professions and the community – are not excluded from any change of policy which seeks to reward researchers for being more outward-looking.

Point 26. The Government may need to intervene to ensure that research excellence is represented in the regions of the UK, perhaps by encouraging regional networks in important subjects (paragraph 55).

35. The Committee is right to note that there is no regional dimension to our research funding. It would be possible to introduce a regional dimension into our funding model, if this were thought important for policy reasons, but this would imply in some cases taking funding away from units deemed to be of higher quality and giving more to units judged of lower quality, because of their location.

Point 27. Research into matters of local importance can be vital to communities and the economy. If the RAE cannot recognise such work a mechanism needs to be identified that will (paragraph 56).

36. As mentioned above, the RAE is concerned only with quality. It can recognise all types of research, and there is no reason why research which takes as its focus local issues cannot achieve high grades.

Point 28. HEFCE should monitor levels of investment in infrastructure carefully and if necessary introduce a recurrent funding stream (paragraph 57).

37. We agree with the recommendation in principle but note its cost implications.

Funding the RAE

Point 29. We believe that HEFCE was right to use RAE2001 [to determine the research funding for 2003-03]: if you have a selective mechanism for funding it should reflect the current state of research. But we take issue with the way the cake was cut (paragraph 69).

38. The Committee is, presumably, saying that it disagrees with the degree of selectivity we have adopted in allocating research funding. We can assure the Committee that our decisions were reached only after the most careful consideration. We have also said that, if additional funds become available, our priority will be to increase the funding provided to units rated 5 and 4.

Point 30. We recommend that the Government introduce and resource a seedcorn fund to stimulate the development of research in new departments, as part of a strategic framework for research funding (paragraph 71).

39. We agree that there is a strong case for a fund to encourage the development of research capability where this is weak at present. Subject to the availability of funds, we have said previously that we would intend to create such a fund.

Point 31. We recommend that HEFCE introduce a more sophisticated weighting system, which accurately reflects the high costs of research in certain scientific subjects (paragraph 73).

40. The Committee makes the assumption that a 'more sophisticated' system would change the funding weights. These at present reflect the relative costs of conducting research in different disciplines, as reported to us by institutions in their financial monitoring returns. These weights are kept under review, and if it becomes apparent that further changes are needed, then we can assure the Committee that these will be made.

Responsibility

Point 32. In their evidence to us, HEFCE seemed to believe that any side effects of the RAE were unfortunate and somehow nothing to do with them. If HEFCE has a mechanism

for selective research funding then it must take responsibility for any distortions (paragraph 58).

41. We can assure the Committee that we accept fully the need to take into account all of the effects of our policies and processes, and if an impression to the contrary has been given, then this is very much to be regretted.

Point 33. While HEFCE cannot be blamed for the level of funding that is available for higher education research, it must bear primary responsibility for the way the RAE funding deficit has been handled (paragraph 74).

42. We accept full responsibility for our funding decisions.

Point 34. Some responsibility for the funding decisions must lie with the DfES and with the Minister for Lifelong Learning and Higher Education. The RAE and the funding decisions based on it have major repercussions for the higher education system. We find it hard to believe that the Minister is prepared to delegate all of that power to an unelected quango. It cannot be in the public interest that she should do so (paragraph 75).

43. The decision to establish the Funding Councils was that of Parliament, as were the functions given respectively to the Government and to the Funding Councils.

Point 35. The DfES must also bear responsibility for the financial dilemma which HEFCE has been facing. We appreciate that the Government has a number of priorities in education, but it must not lose sight of the need to maintain and develop an excellent research base. We welcome the Minister's commitment to fight for a generous settlement for higher education in the Spending Review (paragraph 76).

44. We share the Select Committee's welcome for the Minister's comments.

Point 36. We fully accept that higher education is the responsibility of DfES, not of DTI, but we would suggest that the Cabinet Minister for Science should take a closer interest in the RAE and in the funding of higher education research, since it is vitally important to the future of science and technology in the UK (paragraph 77).

45. This recommendation does not relate to HEFCE. We note however, that the roles of the various governmental stakeholders in the decision-making process would need to be very clearly defined.

Under-funding

Point 37. Discussions about the mechanism for the allocation for research funding are largely meaningless unless the under-funding of university research is addressed. There is a strong case for a substantial increase in the HE research budget. This should not be less than the £200 million a year required to fund RAE2001 using the formula employed until recently and to restore the project funding/QR ration to 1993-94 levels. Borne in

mind should be the chronic under-funding in university research for much longer than this (paragraph 78).

Point 38. We welcome the science and research cross-cutting review and trust that it will spell out clearly for the Treasury the value of science and engineering research and its present parlous state of under-funding ... UK university research is already among the best in the world without the funding it deserves. The Spending Review 2000 brought great benefits for the Science Budget. Now has come the time to put right the imbalance in the dual support system by delivering a significant increase in funding for higher education research (paragraph 79).

46. The quantum of the funding provided for research is a matter for the Government not HEFCE, but we welcome the Select Committee's comments about this. In particular, we stress the importance of having an appropriate ratio between project funding and the funds provided by the Funding Council.

Options for the future

Point 39. It is generally agreed that the RAE has achieved all it can in its present form. The question is whether we abandon it completely or whether it could form part of a broader funding mechanism for higher education research (paragraph 80).

Point 40. We are not persuaded that research assessments should rely entirely on success in obtaining Research Council grants (paragraph 82).

Point 41. It is generally agreed that there is a future for the RAE, but not in its current form. We need an RAE with a lighter touch (paragraph 83).

Point 42. We recommend that the RAE should take place every six years, with interim assessment as requested by developing departments or as considered necessary by HEFCE (paragraph 84).

Point 43. We believe that the RAE should continue but only as a part of a broader higher education research funding strategy in which its side effects and disadvantages are offset by other mechanisms. We suggest the following model for discussion. HEFCE's research budget could be divided into four sections –

- *Funding excellence.* Top-rated departments would be exempted from the formal research assessment process if they wish [and funded on their ability to attract external funding].
- *Promoting new centres of excellence.* Other departments could continue to take part in a research assessment process.
- *Developing research capacity.* Departments taking part in the research assessment process could apply for development money through a bidding process and would be assessed by subject panels based upon the RAE UoAs.
- *Fostering external collaborative research.* This fund would support the indirect costs of institutions attracting external project funding [for departments entering the formal assessment process] (paragraph 86).

Point 44. This model of research funding could operate within a broader system of higher education funding which provides incentives for excellence in all areas of universities' activities: teaching, community and economic involvement as well as research. The aim should be to produce a coherent funding system, with a small number of flexible funds (paragraph 88).

Point 45. No doubt the Funding Councils' review of the RAE will consider a range of options for the future. We await its outcome with great interest, since it will have important implications for the future of science and technology in the UK. An effective funding mechanism for research infrastructures will be crucial if we are to maintain and enhance the UK's research excellence and exploit it successfully. It is essential that DfES, the Funding Councils, the devolved administrations, OST, and the Research Councils work closely together to ensure that the funding to the science base is coherent and adequate to maintain the quality of UK research. We shall follow developments closely and, if necessary, report again to the House (paragraph 89).

47. We will consider the Select Committee's recommendations as part of the review of the RAE. We note that the Select Committee's proposals are ambitious and we will need also to consider their costs.

48. We recognise fully the need for a research funding strategy which brings together all major funders of research, and we agree with the Select Committee that all the major funders of research will need to co-operate to ensure that the funding of the science base is coherent and adequate to maintain the quality of UK research.

Debate in the House of Commons

Point 46. We suggest the following motion for debate by the House:
 'That this House commends the higher education sector for the marked improvement in research quality demonstrated by the Research Assessment Exercise 2001; takes note of the conclusions and recommendations in the Second Report of the Science and Technology Committee on the Research Assessment Exercise (HC 507); notes the concerns reflected in that Report on the impact of the RAE on research priorities and on universities' other functions; acknowledges the vital contribution which higher education research in science and technology makes to society and to the economy; and calls on the Government to fund the RAE results fully in the forthcoming Spending Review' (paragraph 90).

49. We welcome the Select Committee's suggestion of a debate in the House of Commons. This is an important topic which should be widely debated at the highest levels.

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